

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-05 CIAE-00 INR-07 DODE-00

L-03 IGA-02 SP-02 IO-13 TRSE-00 EB-07 OMB-01

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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4369

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 6845

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IV

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE MINISTERIAL CHANGES

REF: (A) STATE 157911, (B) ABIDJAN 5903

1. TORCZNER'S REPORT IN REFTEL IS YET ANOTHER IN A SPATE OF RUMORS WHICH HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN ABIDJAN DURING PAST TWO OR THREE MONTHS. NORMALLY WELL-INFORMED SOURCES TELL US THAT UP TO TEN MINISTERS ARE DUE TO LOSE OR CHANGE THEIR PORTFOLIOS. SAWADOGO AND DIAWARA ARE ON MOST LISTS, EITHER BECAUSE OF CORRUPTION CHARGES OR BECAUSE OF THEIR NON-IVORIAN BACKGROUND. BEDIE'S NAME IS OFTEN MENTIONED, ALTHOUGH SOME THINK HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HOUPHOUET MAY PROTECT HIM. FONMIN USHER IS RUMORED TO BE LEAVING, PERHAPS TO TAKE OVER EDUCATION MINISTRY SINCE HE CHAIRS PDCI EDUCATION COMMITTEE. USUN AMBASSADOR SIMEON AKE MIGHT TAKE HIS PLACE, AND SOME THINK IT NOTEWORTHY THAT AKE ATTENDED OAU MINISTERIAL WHILE USHER STAYED HOME. AND SO ON ENDLESSLY.

2. FACTS, AS OPPOSED TO RUMORS, ARE FEW. HOUPHOUET WAS MANIFESTLY CHAGRINED AND ANGRY ABOUT CHARGES OF CORRUPTION. ALL GOIC MINISTERS WERE REQUIRED TO BE PRESENT AT TWO BUREAU POLITIQUE MEETINGS IN LATE JUNE. MOST IVORIAN AMBASSADORS WERE RECALLED FOR CONSULTATION AT THAT TIME. NO RPT NO OFFICIAL
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DECISIONS HAVE YET BEEN MADE PUBLIC.

3. THOUGH WE DO NOT DISCOUNT RUMORS, NO ONE IS IN A POSITION TO CONFIRM THEM EXCEPT HOUPHOUET, WHO IS KEEPING HIS OWN COUNSEL EVEN MORE CLOSELY THAN USUAL. IT IS TYPICAL OF HOUPHOUET'S WAY OF OPERATING TO LEAK RUMORS INTO THE ABIDJAN NETWORK (RADIO TREICHVILLE) AND TO POSTPONE DECISIONS UNTIL HE VERY

CAREFULLY ASSESSES THEIR POTENTIAL EFFECT. DESPITE HIS IRRITATION, HOUPHOUET IS APPARENTLY AGAIN GOING TO TAKE TIME FOR REFLECTION AND INTROSPECTION. THERE WILL ALMOST SURELY BE A RESHUFFLE OF CABINET MINISTERS, AND POSSIBLY AMBASSADORS, BUT TIMING AND PERSONALITIES ARE QUITE UNCLEAR. ONE FONOFF OFFICIAL, CLOSE PERSONALLY TO HOUPHOUET, TOLD US CANDIDLY HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT WOULD HAPPEN OR WHEN, AND DOUBTED HOUPHOUET HAD MADE UP HIS OWN MIND.

3. FRENCH AMBASSADOR REMARKED TO ME THAT HE HAD SAID LIGHTLY TO HOUPHOUET IN A RECENT CONVERSATION THAT RUMORS WERE CURRENT THAT "FOUR OF FIVE" MINISTERS WOULD BE CHANGED AND THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD REPLIED DRILY, "AS USUAL, THE FRENCH EMBASSY IS BETTER INFORMED THAN I AM".
STEARNS

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